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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, November 15, 2007

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Published November 15, 2007

Sentenced

- Ira Clinton Gudith, who pleaded guilty last month to second-degree murder in the death of the 94-year-old woman for whom he was the caregiver, was sentenced to six to 15 years in prison.

Judge: State shares guilt in death of 94-year-old

Caregiver gets 6 to 15 years after pleading guilty in case

Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

The state is partially responsible in the death of a 94-year-old Lansing woman, a judge said Wednesday as he sentenced the woman's caregiver to six to 15 years in prison.

Ira Clinton Gudith, 50, pleaded guilty last month to second-degree murder in the death of Margaret Robinson, whose emaciated body was found Jan. 10 inside a cluttered and unkempt house at 619 W. Mt. Hope Ave. She died from a lethal dose of morphine.

The 5-foot-tall woman - who, a forensic pathologist said, suffered from severe Alz-heimer's disease - weighed 82 pounds. Her body was covered with bed sores.

Inside the small home, where Gudith also lived, a police officer testified earlier this year that dirty dishes were piled in the kitchen, and it smelled of dog feces. Clothes and papers covered the bedroom floor, where Robinson's body lay on a bed, covered by a blanket; she wore a recently changed adult diaper.

Gudith, who said he had only completed ninth grade, was a private caregiver for Robinson for 16 years. Robinson did not have children and had outlived her siblings. She never married.

Gudith did not comment during Wednesday's hearing in Ingham County Circuit Court.

Judge James Giddings said the state should have overseen Robinson's care. Robinson received state assistance to pay for care.

"She was allowed to waste away," Giddings said. "There was a stunning lack of accountability here."

A spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services declined to comment on the judge's statement.

"This was a criminal act and the perpetrator is now going to prison," Maureen Sorbet said.

Unable to read, write

Gudith's sister-in-law, Karen Gudith of New Boston, near Detroit, said he was homeless when Robinson's nephew took him into the home 16 years ago.

The nephew died about 10 years ago, she said, leaving Ira Gudith to care for Robinson. But she said "Ike," as she knows him, can't read or write. Karen Gudith described him as a gentle and kind man, who she believes has the mental capacity of a child.

"He can't read a medicine bottle, but he was responsible for giving medicine to her?" she asked.

She added: "I'm not saying what Ike did was OK. But there's a lot of responsibility to go around."

Oversight criticized

Gudith's attorney, Paul Toman, said afterward that there was inadequate oversight by the Michigan Department of Human Services. Case workers reported that "things were going well," Toman said.

"Are there more causes than just (Gudith's) act? Yes," he said.

Assistant Prosecutor Bill Crino argued in court that Gudith could have reported Robinson's condition to caseworkers or an agency, but chose not to.

Robinson received money through a state program in order to hire a provider to take care of her at home, Sorbet said. The program is administered by the state Department of Community Health, but eligibility is determined by the DHS, Sorbet said.

Every six months, a caseworker would go to Robinson's home and determine her need for services. The last visit was in November 2006, Sorbet said.

The caseworker who authorized services determined Robinson was competent, Sorbet said, adding:

"Competent adults can choose anyone they wish to provide these services ... We were complying with the policies of this program. We had no complaints from the client."

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

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STURGIS JOURNAL

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Probe enters seventh day

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By Corky Emrick
Sturgis Journal

CONSTANTINE - With the investigation of who killed

11-year-old Jodi Parrack ending its first week, police continue to sift through hundreds of tips.

Mark Honeysett, Constantine police chief and village manager, said police had received more than 320 tips as of Wednesday morning.

Based on that information, officers have talked to several hundred people. That includes canvassing as well as formal and informal questioning, Honeysett said.

Police are still looking for anyone who may have seen Parrack after 4:45 p.m. Nov. 8.

"No one has reported seeing her after 4:45 p.m.," Honeysett said.

Parrack was last seen riding her bike west on Third Street near Washington Street (U.S. 131).

"I think that there is somebody that has that one piece of information," Honeysett added. "They just may not realize that they have that one piece. So we need to hear from anyone who may have seen something."

The village was shaken again Tuesday night with a report of a possible abduction. It caused a brief increase in tension until police found there was no abduction.

"I think all of the rumors that were flying around pushed people over the edge," Honeysett said. "We just want people to be diligent in caution."

Honeysett said police have no reason to believe there is a "serial killer," no reason to believe there is a stranger in town posing a threat.

"We have no reason to believe there is a 'next' target," Honeysett said.

Nearly 30 officers from the St. Joseph County Major Crime Task Force have been working around the clock since Parrack's body was found.

"They are a Godsend," Honeysett said. "They've been working their butts off on this. They're extremely dedicated to solving this."

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Ex-Gaylord man faces child abuse charges

BY SHERI McWHIRTER

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GAYLORD -- A former Gaylord man faces 16 criminal charges in Genesee County involving child pornography and sexual assault, and officials there said he may have committed crimes in Otsego County as far back as two decades ago.

Kevin Traver Odette, 33, of Clio, is charged with criminal sexual conduct and using a computer to commit a crime while allegedly recording the sexual penetration of five victims between 7 and 13 years old. He faces up to life in prison, if convicted.

Odette grew up in Gaylord and moved downstate when he was a teen.

Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton said most of the child pornography cases they handle typically involve images produced in Europe, unlike this case.

"This crime is especially egregious because he's victimizing children here in mid-Michigan and in northern Michigan," Leyton said. "No matter where the child is from, child pornography involves the abuse of children somewhere in the world. We're not going to tolerate this here."

Odette is jailed on a \$1.6 million bond.

Otsego County Sheriff Jim McBride said he and other authorities in Gaylord are anxious to determine if Odette victimized anyone locally.

"If there are victims up here, I'd hope they'd come forward to our department, the city police, or the state," McBride said. "I would want to see him prosecuted here, too. His alleged victims have probably been scarred for life."

Genesee County Sheriff Robert Pickell said 200 DVDs and 75 VHS tapes seized by authorities show victimization of as many as 70 boys and girls over many years.

"It's like they're performing for a porno flick," Pickell said. "Hard-bitten detectives had a difficult time watching the videos."

Pickell said they know of at least two victims from Gaylord who allegedly were assaulted by Odette 23 years ago, when he was their babysitter.

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Head start bill passes U.S. House

Thursday, November 15, 2007

A bill from U.S. Rep. Dale E. Kildee, D-Flint, to reauthorize "the popular and effective Head Start program," passed the House on Wednesday, Kildee said.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act would reauthorize Head Start for the first time since 1998. Head Start is an early education program and has served more than 20 million low-income children and families since 1965.

Kildee's bill would: Ensure that half of teachers nationwide have a bachelor's degree by 2013, update current standards and assessments, increase the program's flexibility to serve children whose families are between 100-130 percent of the poverty line, prioritize the expansion of Early Head Start, emphasize early identification of child and family mental health needs and require programs to implement best practices for family service workers.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act is expected to pass the Senate later this week and to be signed by the president, Kildee said.

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Article published Nov 15, 2007

Teen will stand trial as adult in bus case

Trace Christenson

The Enquirer

A 16-year-old Battle Creek teenager, charged with shooting at a school bus two months ago, will stand trial as an adult.

Last month, a judge ruled Devin Stewart would be tried on 57 counts after he allegedly fired four shots at a Battle Creek Public Schools bus filled with students. Wednesday, the same judge ruled Stewart would be tried in adult court.

"He needs lengthy, lengthy supervision," said Calhoun County Circuit Court Judge Conrad Sindt, sitting in the Family Court Division, "far longer than this court can keep him. The best interest is to waive him to circuit court."

Stewart faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison if convicted on the assault and weapons charges, including assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder.

And while Sindt said Stewart is presumed innocent, if he is convicted, the juvenile division can only maintain control of him until he is 21.

But Sindt, after hearing testimony from a psychologist, police officer, juvenile court and school officials, said Stewart should be jailed longer.

Citing an evaluation by Dr. Randy Haugen, a child psychologist, who interviewed and administered psychological tests on Stewart, Sindt said, "the defendant has to age before he can be considered safe."

Stewart is charged with the Sept. 12 shooting of the bus near West Street and Garfield Avenue. Battle Creek police said four shots were fired from a small-caliber handgun while the bus was stopped at the intersection. Investigators determined it was gang related. Stewart surrendered to police two days later.

In October, after a hearing, Sindt ruled there was enough evidence to send the case to trial.

After Wednesday's decision, Stewart would be sentenced to the Department of Corrections if he is found guilty. No date was immediately set for his arraignment. He is being held in the county jail.

Witnesses Wednesday included:

- Vince Munoz, of the Battle Creek Police Department and school liaison officer at Battle Creek Central, who said Stewart is a member of the gang MOB, or Money Over Bitches, the largest gang in the city. He called Stewart intelligent and said he has a high-level position in the gang hierarchy. Munoz said he thought Stewart might be moving away from his gang affiliation so his alleged participation in the shooting was "discouraging and disappointing. I had told him he had potential to be a leader in our community for the positive."
- David Riley, Circuit Court probation supervisor, said if Stewart is convicted his minimum sentence likely would be 34 to 67 months.
- Laura Whipple of the Calhoun Intermediate School District said records show Stewart was expelled from Battle Creek Central on May 19, 2006, seven days after he was involved in a fight with another student outside the fieldhouse. The other student suffered head injuries in the incident. Whipple also said records showed at least seven incidents during the 2005-2006 school year in which Stewart was disciplined seven times by the school, including for assault on another student, threatening a teacher, and being rude and disruptive.
- Jody Hopkins, assistant supervisor of juvenile probation, said there are few programs for teenagers 16 1/2 to 17 years old and most are only 12 to 18 months long.
- Haugen, who said Stewart is intelligent but has antisocial characteristics and has displayed those at home, at school and in the community. "There is a significant risk for potential problems in the future," he said. "There is no help in the juvenile system. He needs longer supervision." Haugen said time will help Stewart because criminal activity decreases for most men after they are 25 or 26 years old.
- Joann Capers, Stewart's mother, said her son was not a discipline problem at home and was trying to return to school. She called the incident that resulted in his expulsion, a "school yard fight that got out of hand."

Niels Magnusson, Stewart's attorney, argued that several programs in the juvenile system have not yet been tried and there are few options in the adult penal system to help him.

But Assistant Prosecutor Mike Lind said the offense, if Stewart is convicted, is serious enough to require a long incarceration and "there is not enough time in the juvenile system to rehabilitate him."

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.



Group aims to recruit male mentors

Thursday, November 15, 2007

By Dave Murray

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- On a day city leaders were talking about juvenile crime, a nonprofit group said it is looking for people to help with a potential solution: mentors.

Backed by leaders from the schools, government and law enforcement, Roy Clark told representatives from area churches he needs their help in recruiting 2,000 male mentors by 2010.

Clark has been executive director of Mentor 1 since the group's May launch, and he told pastors assembled Wednesday at Gerald R. Ford Middle School he needs time at their pulpits and in their lobbies to attract men to nearly 20 organizations that hope to pair youngsters and adults.

"Our first goal is to create a culture of mentoring in our community," Clark said. "We want to make mentoring cool for men."

Clark has some high-powered backers -- people attending the session included Mayor George Heartwell, Grand Rapids Public Schools Superintendent Bernard Taylor, Interim Police Chief Kevin Belk and Grand Rapids District Judge Benjamin Logan.

Heartwell told pastors he scaled back his commitments once he became mayor, but still makes time for mentoring two seminary students -- and Mentor 1.

"This is important for us in Grand Rapids," Heartwell said. "And it will make a difference that you cannot imagine."

Several pastors said they embrace the idea. Rik Stevenson, of City Hope Ministries, said he will welcome the group into his church and pledged to help connect his congregation.

"Count me in!" he told Clark after the meeting. "We need to do this."

Clark said his group, which is funded by donors, recruits, screens and trains people 18 and older who can make at least a one-year commitment and steers them to organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Bethany Christian Services and Junior Achievement.

So far, the group has 48 people signed up.

"Two thousand is a big, audacious goal," Clark said.

But Superintendent Taylor said the need for mentors is great, especially at the high school level.

"We're grateful that we have many people who work with the younger children, who are cute, compliant and will listen," he said. "But our need is at the middle and high schools. These kids are not thugs and terrorists. They're kids who do kid things, and some just need a little guidance."

Clark said the group's recruiting campaign will include advertising and booths at sporting events and other places that typically attract men.



Boyfriend: 'I'm going to kill you'

Thursday, November 15, 2007

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A woman who was stabbed seven times, with one wound penetrating her liver, testified Wednesday against her former boyfriend, who is charged with murder for killing the woman's uncle in the same attack.

Kelly Sue Holmes said 44-year-old Robert Hall was angry when he arrived at her house on Fifth Street NW and Broadway Avenue on July 24. She said Hall grabbed her, holding a knife to her throat, forcing her to the ground and telling her she had ruined his life.

"He said: 'Don't scream, Kelly. Don't scream, I'm going to kill you,'" she said during the probable-cause hearing in Grand Rapids District Court.

Her uncle, 47-year-old George Irwin, told Hall to get off her. When Hall got up, Holmes said he stabbed her, then chased Irwin down the driveway.

A few seconds later, Holmes testified she saw her uncle collapse, and then Hall jumped on her again, bringing down the knife over and over. The injuries put her in the hospital for a week.

Irwin died from stab wounds, according to the Kent County medical examiner.

A.C. Marshall, whose girlfriend lived across the street, said he was on the porch when he heard screaming, then saw Hall on top of Holmes, stabbing her.

"I thought he was hitting her until I got up on her," Marshall said.

Under questioning by defense attorney John Pyrski, Holmes said she and Hall had a troubled relationship.

Holmes, 37, said the two were together for about a year and Hall was abusive throughout.

Even after police were called to her house and she told them she wanted nothing to do with Hall, the two were having sex under the highway overpass on Broadway Avenue NW the night before the stabbing, she said.

Even after he was sent to jail and then to Ypsilanti for psychiatric evaluation, she continued to call and write him, sending him poems.

But she also helped police by providing them with a letter written to her aunt, in which Hall admitted responsibility for the stabbing.

In October, Hall was not able to attend a court hearing because he couldn't answer basic questions from mental health experts, according to Pyrski.

As Holmes testified, Hall sat in his red jumpsuit and buried his head in his hands.

Hall's case now moves to Kent County Circuit Court on felony murder and weapons charges, but Pyrski seeks another psychiatric exam.



Giving food, getting feedback from poor

Annual dinner gives agencies an opportunity to learn what else is needed

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, November 15, 2007

By George Jaksa

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FLINT - Ask Valrie Young or Timothy Tucker what most would help improve their lives, and their immediate response is "a job."

"I have been unemployed for 10 years," said Young, 41, who lives with her mother in Flint.

Tucker, 50, who lives with a friend in Flint, hasn't worked since General Motors let him go years ago because he failed to correctly answer one of the questions on a test, he said.

Agencies that reach out to the poor and homeless are looking forward to the answers that Young, Tucker and others gave on a survey collected during a free lunch Wednesday at four sites in Flint.

"For years, we have been holding these dinners, but we don't know if we are doing it right, so we are asking you if we are doing it right," Pete Hutchison, who heads Bridges to the Future at the United Way of Genesee County, told the more than 150 people who came to First Presbyterian Church in downtown Flint for an annual meal.

After the participants - some of them homeless or living in shelters - answered the surveys with the help of students in a Michigan State University social work master's program, they each were given a bag of clothing and toiletries and two free bus passes.

Cheers went up when Hutchison announced the gift of free bus passes.

Young and Tucker, who are cousins, said they appreciated the bus passes because that's how they get around if they are not walking to such places as the North End Soup Kitchen or Carriage Town Ministries for food.

"We're looking at what's in the heart of people who can help us," said Tucker, who exists on food stamps. "A lot of people are hurting."

Elizabeth Stamp, 48, of Fenton Township, who is in a three-year MSU master's program, quizzed the pair on the seven-part survey.

"They said what they need most are jobs, an opportunity to go back to school, food, money and transportation," said Stamp, one of the 15 students who helped the dinner participants at First Presbyterian fill out the surveys.

Surveys asked such questions as where participants live and for how long, what some of their nonhousing needs are, where they get their help and if their economic situation has changed in the past year.

Cindy Cromwell, the AFL-CIO community service liaison for the United Way, said at least 500 bags of clothing and sundries were handed out Wednesday at the North End Soup Kitchen, East Side Mission, Vermont Christian Church and First Presbyterian.

Each bag included a hat, scarf, gloves, socks and such items as shampoo, toothpaste and toothbrush. Some of the clothing was handmade, Cromwell said, while other groups and individuals donated items or money to buy them.

"Our goal is to make sure there is no such thing as homeless people in the county," she said.

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UM-Flint group to give food to those in need

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, November 15, 2007

By Beata Mostafavi

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FLINT - The University of Michigan-Flint Muslim Student Association will distribute food to Flint residents Friday.

Sandwiches, chips and juice will be distributed beginning at 4 p.m. from the Muslim House, 804 King Ave.

The food items will be given to anyone who has a need.

- Beata Mostafavi

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Food basket donations sought

Thursday, November 15, 2007

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

The White Pines Middle School Parent Teacher Association is seeking donations for 50 Thanksgiving food baskets it is preparing for local distribution.

The PTA is collecting the following items: canned fruit, canned and boxed potatoes, stuffing, gravy packets, jellied cranberry, dish soap, napkins, paper towels, toilet paper four-packs, toothpaste, shampoo and bar soap. Donated items may be dropped off at the office at White Pines Middle School, 1400 S. Griffin, Grand Haven.

Students and faculty at White Pines Middle School have been collecting canned goods and box food items since early September.

"The students at White Pines have done a fantastic job, and we realize that the need is greater than ever in our community," said PTA President David Gignac. "Our plan is to have 50 baskets with a complete turkey dinner, pantry and personal items. School Principal Mike Shelton said members of Grand Haven Public Safety will be delivering the baskets so the process is kept confidential.

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ourMidland.com
from the Midland Daily News

11/15/2007

Michigan Harvest Gathering raises \$337,000 to end hunger

The Food Bank Council of Michigan has raised \$337,000 so far to end hunger in Michigan through the 17th annual Michigan Harvest Gathering campaign.

The fundraising drive helps supply the state's regional food banks through donations of food and money. The regional food banks in turn supply food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. This year's campaign, which began Sept. 13, aimed to raise \$350,000 and collect 500,000 pounds of food.

Michigan Harvest Gathering has raised more than \$5.3 million and 7.7 million pounds of food, equal to 13 million meals, since its founding in 1991 by Bill and Cynthia Schuette.

"More than a million people in our state will see a direct benefit from this year's work toward ending hunger," said Jane Marshall, executive director of the Food Bank Council. "We could not have accomplished this without the help of the Secretary of State Teri Lynn Land and all of our gracious donors."

Secretary of State offices will continue collecting food and cash donations until Dec. 15. To contribute to ending hunger, call 1-800-552-GIVE (4483) or go online to www.feedmichigan.org.

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NDS collects 1,855 food items

Thursday, November 15, 2007 10:02 AM EST

Union High School National Honor Society collected 1,855 food items as of Wednesday to divide between First United Methodist Church, St. John's Lutheran Church and St. Vincent DePaul Society.

That's more than double the amount of food gathered in 2006.

NHS was paced by adviser Becky Turner's class, 625; Katrina Hargreaves-Lee's class, 275; and Jennings Brosnan's class, 170.

The three leaders will be treated to doughnuts first hour on Friday.



Ashley Smith packs some of the 1,855 food items the Union High School National Honor Society collected for its food drive.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Donations needed to provide emergency energy assistance to county residents

Thursday, November 15, 2007

BY HANNAH MCKINNEY

An Oct. 9 Kalamazoo Gazette headline read, "Cold fact: Winter heat to cost more." The story mentioned the Salvation Army has a fund to help county residents who will not be able to keep warm this winter because of high fuel prices.

The fund exists, but it is empty. The only way to help our neighbors is for all of us to give to either the Walk for Warmth or to the Salvation Army.

Emergency energy assistance funds help Kalamazoo County residents pay their heat and electric bills. In a typical year, residents could apply to the Department of Human Services, Salvation Army, the Community Action Bureau, or a local church and be fairly sure their energy bill shortfall could be addressed. Year by year, more families have needed assistance since energy prices have been steadily increasing and real wages falling.

When a family is unable to pay its utilities and has received a notice of intent to shutoff power in 30 days, the first place they can receive assistance is through the state's Department of Human Services.

In July, the state reduced the annual maximum allowable payments the DHS could make for each family from \$1,100 (\$550 for electric and \$550 for gas) to \$700 (\$350 for electric and \$350 for gas). DHS personnel estimate they see 500 applicants for energy assistance every month in Kalamazoo County, and that 70 percent of those have already reached their cap for 2007. Not that the cap matters much at the moment, since DHS is completely out of energy assistance funds.

Once a family gets a directive that says how much energy assistance DHS will give, the family then goes to the Salvation Army, which receives money from the state and Consumers Energy, as well as from United Way and other contributors. The Salvation Army typically helps 1,149 families a year, and can provide a maximum of \$357.31 to each family. This year, however, it is virtually out of money, and has turned away 1,696 families.

The Community Action Bureau is another important player in our community's energy assistance safety net. After a family has been to DHS and the Salvation Army, CAB is the next stop. CAB receives funds from a variety of programs each year, a portion of which can be spent on energy payments. The Walk for Warmth is the CAB's annual fund-raiser for "last resort" dollars. Last year, 40 families received assistance from Walk for Warmth.

When the agencies have no funds, residents turn to churches. One minister commented at an energy meeting this summer, "In 40 years in the ministry, I have never seen anything like this." Churches in the city of Kalamazoo have very limited funds. Indeed, unless we as a community step up our contributions to Walk for Warmth and/or the Salvation Army, many residents in this county will face the winter months without heat and electricity.

How did this happen? The state's dismal economy is part of the story, rising energy prices another part and reduced federal funding for social services is another.

How can you help? Donate to the Salvation Army, 1700 S. Burdick, Kalamazoo, MI 49001 or call 344-6119. Donate to the Walk for Warmth, 3299 Gull Road, Room 310, Kalamazoo, MI 49048. Participate in the Walk for Warmth in February to raise the dollars desperately needed across the county for emergency energy assistance.

Hannah McKinney is vice mayor of Kalamazoo, Walk for Warmth chairwoman and honorary chairwoman of the Red Kettle Campaign of the Salvation Army in Kalamazoo.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

After a year of combating homelessness, some progress

Thursday, November 15, 2007

A year ago, the Kalamazoo County Affordable Housing Partnership kicked off its project to end homelessness here in 10 years.

Since then, more state and federal housing help has come to Kalamazoo County, coalitions of advocates for the homeless have joined to maximize resources and reduce duplication of effort, and a more systematic way to locate and count the homeless has been set up.

Even so, the number of homeless people continues to be high.

According to the Kalamazoo County Shelter Provider Report, more than 700 people are staying in shelters for the homeless in any given month. In addition, 6,445 people sought shelter between October 2006 and September.

That doesn't count those homeless people who lived outdoors or who stayed on friends' sofas.

The partnership, sponsored by the Local Initiatives Support Corp., this week enumerated the progress that has been made in the last year:

- v Fifty-five new housing vouchers through the state's Homeless Assistance Recovery Program and 150 more housing vouchers for low-income people through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority allowed more people to get off -- or stay off -- the street.

- v \$2.5 million in state and federal funding was secured for emergency shelter, temporary and permanent housing and rental assistance.

- v A "point-in-time" census of the homeless was conducted in January -- a snapshot of homelessness for one day in Kalamazoo County.

- v Local data collection on homeless people was integrated with state data collection, allowing for better information and analysis. Project planners hope to better quantify data associated with homelessness to more accurately evaluate whether progress is being made.

LISC's plan for 2008 includes:

- v Emphasizing getting homeless people into permanent housing, rather than into temporary shelters.

- v Developing a plan for helping to prevent evictions. This plan may become even more important as more county residents face foreclosures on their homes next year.

- v Increasing the number of housing units available for the chronically homeless.

LISC and the Affordable Housing Partnership certainly set up an ambitious plan when they announced their intent to end homelessness here in 10 years.

Their worthwhile goal can -- and should -- be accomplished.

But there's a lot to be done.



Open house planned at renovated shelter

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, November 15, 2007

By George Jaksa

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FLINT - The public will get a chance to inspect the new location of My Brother's Keeper shelter 5:30-7 p.m. today at 101 N. Grand Traverse St.

The former Harvest House Shelter has been transformed into an overnight shelter with a lunch program and clothing room. The renovation and beautification of the area along the Flint River also has been aided through a \$35,000 grant from the Ruth Mott Foundation.

Patrick McNeal, executive director, said My Brother's Keeper of Genesee County formerly was at another downtown area location.

- George Jaksa

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Michigan's Oct. jobless rate hits 7.7%

November 15, 2007

BY JOHN GALLAGHER

FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Bad news on the automotive front pushed Michigan's October unemployment rate up to 7.7%.

The jobless rate is the state's highest in 15 years, two-tenths of a percentage point higher than September's rate, and it almost certainly guarantees that Michigan will continue to post the worst state unemployment rate in the nation.

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"The October unemployment rate increase reflects short-term layoffs in the auto industry," said Rick Waclawek, director of the state's Department of Labor and Economic Growth's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives. "October layoffs in the auto sector were associated with reduced production schedules."

The national jobless rate in October was unchanged over the month at 4.7%.

Since October 2006, about 75,000 Michiganders have dropped out of the workforce, the state reported.

"Those are really big numbers," said Ilhan Geckil, senior economist at the Anderson Economic Group consulting firm in East Lansing. "These show some people decided to stop looking for a job or left the state. This is a very bad signal for the economy. We really need to do more for job creation."

Contact **JOHN GALLAGHER** at 313-222-5173 or gallagher@freepress.com.

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The County Press

Church making sure every kid has Christmas presents

BY JENNIFER DECKER
STAFF REPORTER

To Pam Barnett, there's no greater feeling than giving and making sure every child has a Christmas around the world.

That is the basis of Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse. West Goodland United Methodist Church will serve as a relay center to send shoeboxes of gifts to impoverished people worldwide.

"We've already had a lot of people," Pastor Pam Barnett said. "It's a Samaritan's Purse program to help children all over the world. Last year we even delivered to Timbuktu (Mali)."

Through the program, children ages 2-14 will receive a shoebox filled with toys, school supplies, hygiene items, or clothes. These children would receive no gift at all without the gifts of compassion, Barnett said.

"What we do is make sure the shoeboxes are in good shape. Men in our church help load them onto diesel trucks," Barnett said. "You decide if you want to buy for a girl or boy, age, and a warm or cold climate area. You fill the shoebox with whatever catches your eye. I like to do a box for every age category. It's such a delight to us."

Deacon Ann Emerson of Lakeport is a volunteer for Operation Christmas Child. She said, "Through the simple gift you can impact the life of a child for \$15."

Barnett said her church has been contributing to the shoebox project for the last seven years. "We love to do it because for some of the children this will be their first Christmas present. When children receive the gifts it's a day of celebration and they also get the message of Christmas," she said.

Emerson coordinates the collection effort and said she anticipates handling 4,500 boxes this year alone for the project. The gifts will then go to North Carolina for more sorting and inspection.

For those able, Samaritan's Purse, which coordinates the effort, requests a \$7 donation to help with mailing expenses. Checks can be made out to Samaritan's Purse.

More information is available in the office of West Goodland United Methodist Church office or call (810) 724-1747 or 417-0714 for more details or to receive a packing guide to help put together a box. Nothing resembling war-like items, or breakable, spillable, or items that can be damaged by temperatures can be sent.

The church is located at 2008 Van Dyke, Imlay City near Armstrong Road.

The church will be open this week and accepting donated boxes through Sunday. The following are the hours boxes will be accepted: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. through Thursday; 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday; 9 a.m. to noon Saturday; and 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday.

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